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AUTHOR Gretler, Armin
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the European Documentation and Information System for Education (EUDISED) had a highly successful first stage of development, but that it is currently going through a period of stagnation. The system's decentralization, multilingual approach, and coverage of a full range of educational data make it plain that EUDISED is a well-designed project, and notable achievements during the first stage included the creation of a multilingual thesaurus; the publication of the EUDISED R&D Bulletin, which provides standardized information on research and development projects in education; and the maintenance of continuing long-term cooperation among 20 or so European countries. The stagnation could be overcome by a more general recognition of the value of the work already undertaken within the context of EUDISED, by not limiting the database to information on educational research projects, and by making available the resources needed to develop efficiently the whole EUDISED activity. An analytical study of EUDISED has been commissioned by the Council for Cultural Co-operation and the report is scheduled for presentation to the council in January 1989. (CGD)

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

EUDISED

EUDISED: achievements, current stagnation and the need to overcome it. Paper presented by Armin Gretler to the Council for Cultural Co-operation

and

Extract from the report on the 52nd session of the Council for Cultural Co-operation

Abstract

It is argued that EUDISED had a highly successful first stage of development, but that it is currently going through a period of stagnation. This stagnation could be overcome by a more general recognition of the value of the work already undertaken within the context of EUDISED, by not limiting the database to information on educational research projects, and by making available the resources needed to develop efficiently the whole EUDISED activity. The Council for Cultural Co-operation, whilst expressing its support for EUDISED, called for an analytical study to be undertaken.

EUDISED descriptors

cost-benefit analysis; Council of Europe; data bank; educational information; EUDISED; information service; information system; systems analysis

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EUDISED: achievements, current stagnation and the need to overcome it

Paper presented by Armin Gretler to the 52nd session of the Council for Cultural Co-operation (Strasbourg, 23-26 June 1987)

The EUDISED group has asked me to report to you on this activity, which is both yours and ours: the European Documentation and Information System for Education. My task is made a great deal easier by the fact that you have been provided with document CDCC (87) 4, which describes EUDISED in some detail. I can therefore concentrate on essentials and give an overview, which I intend to do in three main points:

1. I should first like to show that EUDISED is a well-designed project and was highly successful in its first stage.

2. I shall then try to show that it is currently going through a period of stagnation.

3. Lastly, I should like to discuss with you a few ways of overcoming this stagnation and of taking a clear-sighted, resolute step - which I consider essential - towards further development of EUDISED.

1. Basic options and achievements during the first stage of development

I shall now attempt to illustrate my first contention that EUDISED is a well-designed project and was highly successful in the first stage of its development.

As you know, the idea of a European educational documentation and information network took shape in the early 1970s. It soon focused on three basic options which have lost none of their importance or significance today:

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1. Decentralisation: the system is based on a network of national agencies in the various Council of Europe member states.

2. A multilingual approach: Europe is marked by cultural pluralism, which is an advantage. One aspect of this is multilingualism regarded as a major asset by EUDISED which has created tools for integrating and preserving it in the system.

3. The third basic option concerns the range of educational data covered by the system. It was decided at the outset to aim for a full range; EUDISED should therefore cover the entire field of education. We shall see later that, unlike the other two, this goal has not yet been achieved.

These three basic options make it plain that EUDISED is a well-designed project.

We now come to EUDISED's achievements during its first stage, which was, as I have said, highly successful. What are the grounds for this very positive assessment of the first stage?

EUDISED's creation of the multilingual thesaurus for processing educational data was a pioneering move. In 1974 the thesaurus was available in English, French and German. By pioneering I mean, among other things, that it is not a matter of translation, but of genuine multilingual creation, using the three languages with their different cultural contexts simultaneously. Having begun with three languages, the thesaurus has been available since 1984 in nine: English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Italian, Greek and Portuguese; a Slovene version is in preparation. The different language versions were drawn up at the initiative of the countries concerned, which in my view testifies to the importance of the thesaurus for them. A further success was the adoption of the thesaurus by the European Community, which uses it for its work in education - additional proof of the quality of the system. As you know, a thesaurus is not a static instrument, but a dynamic, constantly changing one, so that the ongoing management of the thesaurus is an important task in any system. Since 1981 the Council of Europe and the European Community have handled its ongoing management jointly.

A second point in favour of a positive assessment of the first stage is that since 1976 EUDISED has been distributing the EUDISED R&D Bulletin, which provides standardised information on research and development projects in education (since 1979 it has been distributed on a commercial basis). Six countries contributed to the first issue (Austria, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), while issue No. 27 lists 20 national agencies as contributors, including one which is not a Council of Europe member state, Yugoslavia; Czechoslovakia is also contributing information for issue No. 28, currently in press (May 1987). Since 1983 - which marked a decisive step forward in the development of EUDISED - information stored in the system has been accessible not only in printed form in the Bulletin, but also online thanks to the facilities provided by a well-known host company, the European Space Agency (ESA) in Frascati.

Lastly, and I believe this is also a highly positive point, EUDISED demonstrates that continuing, long-term co-operation between 20 or so national agencies, ie 20 or so European countries, is perfectly possible.

2. Why the current period of stagnation?

After this highly positive assessment of the first stage in EUDISED's development, we come to my second, less encouraging point: the current period of stagnation.

Why stagnation?

A close look at the evolution of EUDISED gives the impression that development has been, as it were, blocked for some time, and more specifically since 1983, when the database was made available online by ESA - the last major step forward. It is as if the enthusiasm and resolution which marked the first stage are now lacking and some countries are reluctant to tackle a second worthwhile, constructive stage of development, although it is absolutely vital if the EUDISED project is to retain its meaning and raison d'être.

We shall see later what this second stage of development could and should involve. I shall first attempt to analyse a few possible reasons for this reluctance, this lack of enthusiasm and resolution. I shall list five possible reasons, although there may well be others.

1. Resistance to a supposed tendency to centralise. Apparently, the fact that EUDISED now has a central database has produced the impression that the basic option in favour of a decentralised system has been dropped. That is, in my view, a fundamental mistake and misinterpretation: EUDISED remains and will remain a decentralised system; all the input into the system is operated by decentralised national agencies. There is nothing surprising in the age of the computer and automatic data processing, about the fact that the retrieval of data entered in a decentralised manner is also possible online from a central database. As I see it, failure to offer this possibility would suggest incompetence and irresponsibility.

The alternative to a central database would be to establish national but compatible databases and arrange for bilateral consultation between them. Setting aside the fact that not all countries have yet been able to set up their own national bases (Switzerland, for example, is only in the process of doing so), it is perhaps worth looking at the process of data retrieval in both cases (see figures 1 and 2).

No one would seriously claim that a decision-maker, researcher or teacher in country X in need of European data will consult 20 national bases; on the other hand, consulting a central database is already a routine matter, presenting no difficulties. So there is really no alternative to online access to a central database.

However, if a database is to be consulted frequently by different categories of users, it must be interesting and attractive. In its present state, the EUDISED database is unfortunately not as interesting and attractive as it might be.

Figure 1: Documentation and information system with a central database

An enquirer in country X seeks information on topic Y (an aspect of education) from the various European countries. He consults the central database and obtains at the same time (in a single operation) all the information required (including that from countries which do not yet have the necessary equipment for electronic data processing). If preferred, the enquiry may also be confined to a specified number of countries.

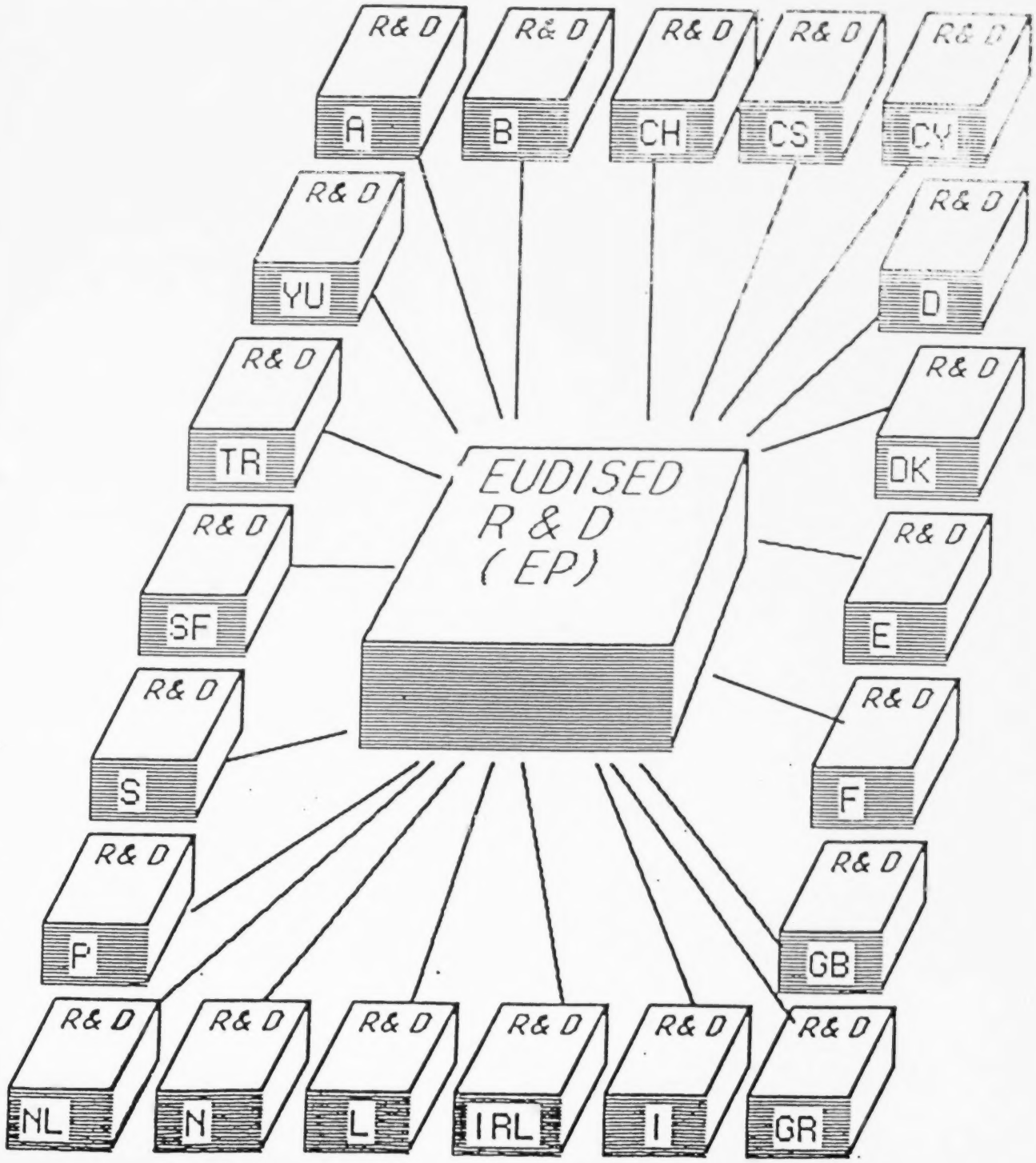
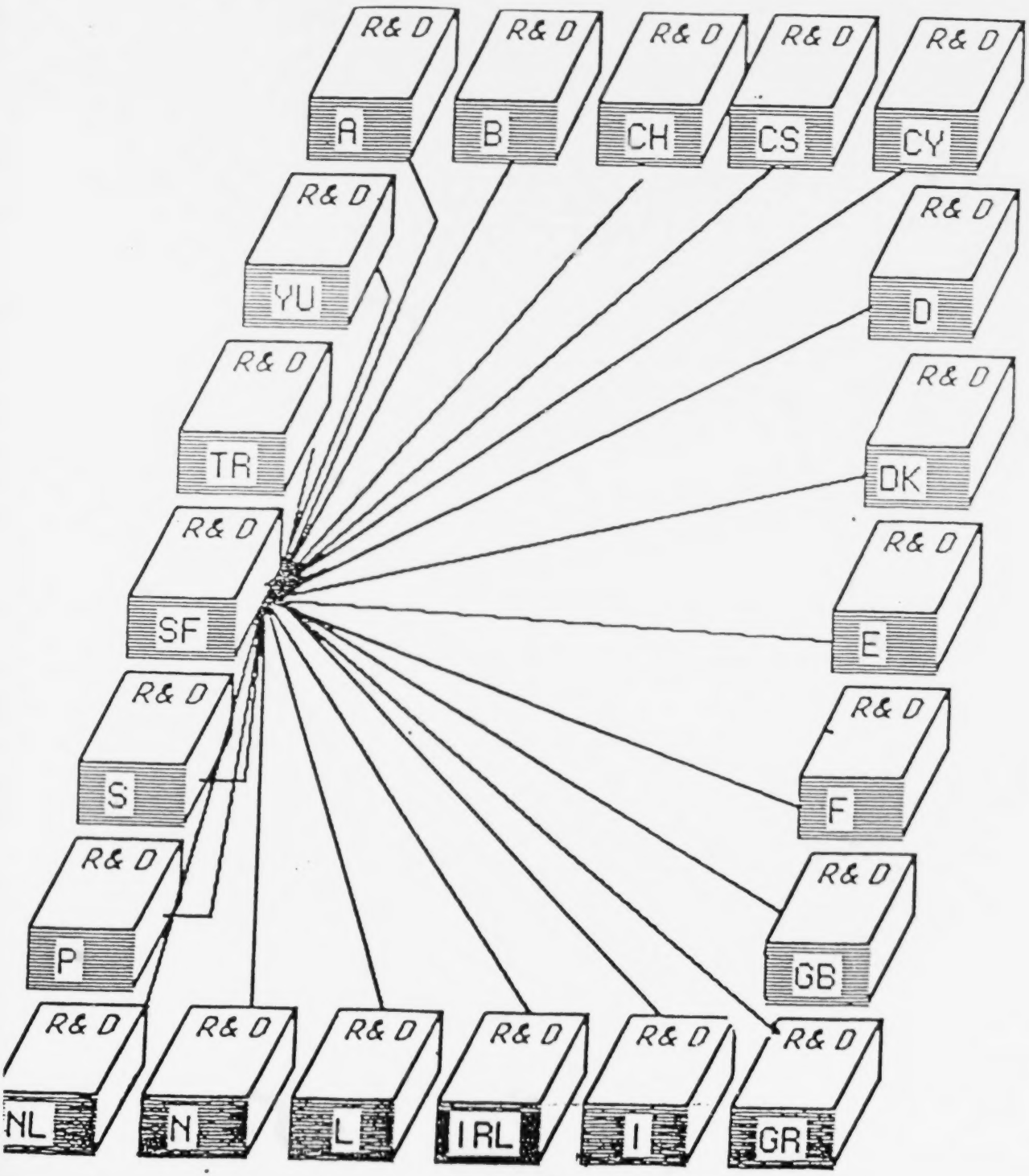


Figure 2: Documentation and information system involving bilateral relations (without a central database)

An enquirer in country X seeks information on topic Y (an aspect of education) from the various European countries. He has to consult, in turn, the various national databases (20 operations, some computerised and others not, depending on the country).



A quantitative comparison of five databases shows that EUDISED has 10 to 150 times fewer indexed documents than the others, with a similar ratio in terms of approximate annual increase (see table 1).

EUDISED is at present limited to R & D and is not even exhaustive in that area. This is mainly due to the fact that the larger countries, where the volume of research is nevertheless much greater than in the smaller countries, do not input more research projects into the EUDISED system than the smaller countries.

EUDISED is also inadequate because for the moment it only covers R & D. Despite thoroughly conclusive experiments, the system has not to date been extended to articles from periodicals and to monographs (EUDISED EP).

Table 1: Quantitative comparison of five databases

DATABASE	DOCUMENTS INDEXED UP TO 1986	APPROXIMATE ANNUAL INCREASE
ERIC EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER USA	600'000	30'000
FRANCIS CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION SCIENCES HUMAINES DU CNRS, FRANCE EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES FORM ONE OF 17 BRANCHES OF THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	900'000	30'000
FORIS SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTLICHES FORSCHUNGSINFORMATIONS-SYSTEM, BRD ERZIEHUNGSWISSENSCHAFT/ BILDUNGSFORSCHUNG BILDET EINEN VON ACHT SEKTOREN	45'000	4'500
SOLIS SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTLICHES LITERATURINFORMATIONSSY-STEM, BRD. UMFASST UNTER ANDEREM BILDUNG	66'000	10'000
EUDISED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN EDUCATION COUNCIL OF EUROPE	6'500	800

2. A second possible reason for the current stagnation is that countries with sophisticated national databases may have less need to seek information beyond their own frontiers. They have their national databases as well as ERIC and other systems in the United States, which may satisfy them. But this surely raises the basic question of principle: do we need Europe? Do we want Europe? In education too? The EUDISED database is different in that it is European. (A similar problem is currently affecting European Community research programmes: the larger countries have national research networks which enable them to dispense with joint research programmes.)

3. A third possible reason for the current stagnation is that a few years ago the European Community set up EURYDICE, an information network on education in the European Community, and EURYDICE and EUDISED are apparently imagined at times to be rivals. Unfortunately, I cannot go into the details of the way in which EURYDICE operates, but all the experts - including those from the European Community - agree that EUDISED and EURYDICE complement one another. The further development of EUDISED, which I shall discuss later, might even strengthen and improve this complementary relationship, to the advantage of both.

4. A fourth partial reason for this stagnation may be that, through its historical development, EUDISED is closely associated, among other things, with the concepts of "educational research" and "computerisation". Not everyone is, in fact, familiar with these two concepts and both "educational research" and "computerisation" are quite often viewed with some suspicion. In my view, anyone wanting to keep up high working standards must inevitably come to terms with computerisation and the research projects, which are at present the sole content of EUDISED, do indeed need to be supplemented by other educational data, such as articles from periodicals and monographs (EUDISED EP).

5. The last partial cause of the current stagnation I shall mention is that the Council of Europe unit responsible for the management of EUDISED, which works efficiently, can only just cope with the present modest level of input. If the amount of data is to be increased, efforts will therefore have to be made to increase the number of qualified staff assigned to that unit.

3. What is to be done to overcome the current stagnation?

What must be done to overcome stagnation and turn EUDISED into a genuine instrument in the service of education in Europe?

The database must be made more interesting and attractive by increasing and improving the input data. More specifically, it is necessary to:

- improve EUDISED's current activities:

  . systematically increase the number of research and development projects (a request directed mainly at the larger countries);

  . as far as possible, speed up current procedures;

- extend the scope of EUDISED, along clearly defined lines, to articles from periodicals and to monographs;

- take on more staff to run the system and equip the Directorate of Education, Culture and Sport with the necessary hardware and software.

As we have seen, EUDISED is a well-designed project and its first stage was extremely worthwhile. As we have also seen, EUDISED is now going through a period of stagnation which must be overcome.

It would not make sense to let a successful and promising project die a slow death. It would not make economic sense not to develop EUDISED: the Council of Europe has invested substantial funds in the project; failure to develop it would mean waving goodbye to those investments, which must instead be made more profitable.

On behalf of my colleagues in the EUDISED group, I call on you to help us to develop EUDISED.

(The paper was first published on 11 May 1987 as document CDCC (87) 31)

Extract from the report on the 52nd session of the Council for Cultural Co-operation (23-26 June 1987) (document CDCC (87) 46

Mr Armin GRETLER (Switzerland) presented EUDISED: its achievements (thesaurus in nine languages, research and development (R & D) database available online through the European Space Agency and in printed form as the EUDISED R & D Bulletin), its current stagnation and the need to overcome it.

In the debate which followed, the delegations of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey underlined the usefulness of EUDISED and the need for its improvement and further development. Many delegations stressed that the Secretariat of EUDISED should be reinforced and be given adequate technical facilities (computer equipment).

Many delegations stressed the urgent need for reinforcing the Secretariat of EUDISED so as to enable it to bring out the commercialised EUDISED R and D Bulletin at regular intervals and not to keep the publishing company and the subscribers waiting. National EUDISED agencies should also be given the necessary support, eg in terms of staff and resources, to help them to supply date in a systematic way.

The delegation of Greece stressed the importance of EUDISED in disseminating the CDCC's work and extending the thesauri in the direction of Eastern Europe so as to enhance the educational content and potential of the EUDISED database.

The CDCC agreed that efforts should be made to

- make the EUDISED database, at present limited to R & D data, more attractive (eg by complete and systematic coverage of R & D projects of European interest in the participating countries, improving the quality of contributions, speeding up processing and publication of data);

- add the thesaurus, the CDCC's own production and the News-letter/Faits Nouveaux to the database in accordance with decisions taken at previous sessions;

- promote the use of the thesaurus and the database within the Council of Europe as well as in member states (e.g. better marketing);

- improve cooperation and coordination among national agencies (e.g. through regional meetings : following the pattern of meetings of EUDISED experts from the German-speaking and Nordic countries).

The CDCC also underlined the importance of thesaurus development and welcomed cooperation with the Commission of the European Communities in this field.

To prepare the basis for future developments with regard to the database, the CDCC decided to commission an analytical study (reviewing, for instance, the use made of the R & D data collected, the profile of the database and the selection criteria, the modalities of collecting, producing and presenting the data, analysing the needs of possible users, manpower and resources required, studying the usefulness and desirability of extending the database to include data from educational periodicals, monographs in terms of cost-benefit, manpower and resources involved and with regard to databases existing elsewhere). The November meeting of the EUDISED Data Network Group should define the terms of reference in detail. The results of the study should be submitted to the CDCC's January session in 1989. The CDCC noted that the Netherlands delegation was prepared to propose an expert.

The United Kingdom delegation, not having received the documents in time, felt unable to take part in an in-depth discussion of EUDISED and stated their conviction that any increase of staff and resources should be postponed until the results of the study were known.

The delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany shared the British view that any further decisions on EUDISED should depend on the outcome of the study and expressed the opinion that such a study should be carried out by independent experts. Perhaps a conference of database producers and users in CDCC countries might help to clarify certain issues.

The observer for the Commission of the European Communities (EURYDICE), Mr J. RICHARDSON, made it clear that - in its present form - the EUDISED database did not duplicate the work of the Commission's four data networks (EURYDICE, modern language teaching, new information technologies and education, mutual recognition of diplomas), because R & D data were not collected by the Commission.

By way of corollary to the substantive debate, the CDCC agreed that the estimate for 1988 for this activity was an absolute minimum (464,000 FF).